WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of recognising characters in a character set developed for magnetic ink character recognition (MICR), comprising:

    optically imaging one or more characters of said character set as a matrix of pixels;

    summing pixel values in each of a plurality of adjacent parallel lines of pixels in said matrix to obtain a line total for each said line; and

    using line totals in recognising said one or more characters.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said using line totals in recognising characters comprises comparing line totals with line totals templates.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said using line totals in recognising characters comprises obtaining differences between adjacent pairs of line totals.

4. The method of claim 3 further comprising comparing said differences with differences templates.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein each said line is chosen so as to parallel a height dimension of said one or more characters.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising optically imaging an edge of a document on which said characters are printed and wherein said lines are chosen to have a pre-determined orientation with respect to said document edge whereby skew may be reduced.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein each said line of pixels is one pixel wide.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein each said line of pixels is more than one pixel wide.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said line totals comprise an array and wherein said using further comprises forming a window around a sub-array of said line totals, a size of said window based on a pre-defined spacing of characters in said character set.

10. The method of claim 9 wherein said using further comprises comparing said sub-array of line totals, or a function of said sub-array of totals, with one or more character template arrays.

11. The method of claim 1 further comprising transporting a document on which said characters are printed in a direction parallel to a height dimension of said characters.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein said character set developed for MICR comprises a set of E13B characters.

13. A method of recognising characters in a character set developed for magnetic ink character recognition (MICR), comprising:

optically imaging one or more characters of said character set as a matrix of pixels;

summing pixel values in each of a plurality of adjacent columns of said matrix to obtain an array of column totals for said plurality of columns; and

using said array of column totals in recognising said one or more characters.

14. Apparatus for use in recognising characters in a character set developed for magnetic ink character recognition (MICR), comprising:

an optical read head for optically imaging one or more characters in said character set as a matrix of pixels;

a memory for storing templates;

a processor for:

summing pixel values in each of a plurality of adjacent parallel lines of pixels in said matrix to obtain an array of line totals for said plurality of lines; and

using said array in recognising said one or more characters.

15. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said optical read head is a charge coupled device (CCD).

16. The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said optical read head is a CMOS imaging device.

17. The apparatus of claim 14 further comprising a conveyor arranged for conveying a document on which said characters are printed in a direction parallel to a height dimension of said characters.

18. A computer readable medium which, when loaded into a computer causes said computer, when said computer stores an image of one or more characters in a character set developed for magnetic ink character recognition (MICR) as a matrix of pixels, to:

   sum pixel values in each of a plurality of adjacent parallel lines of pixels of said matrix to obtain an array of line totals for said plurality of lines; and

   use said array of line totals in recognising said one or more characters.

19. The computer readable medium of claim 18 wherein said computer readable medium further causes said computer to load a series of line total templates prior to comparing said array of line totals.